

## Autism Meltdowns

An Autistic Meltdown is when an individual's surroundings become too overwhelming, their sensory structure becomes triggered, and they need to escape from the situation. They often involve a loss of control of behaviour verbally and/or physically.

A meltdown will often trigger a fight or flight response, and so requires a safe place to calm themselves down where they are not a threat to themselves or others. During a meltdown, an individual may display extreme behaviours, such as shouting, self-harm, aggression or repetitive behaviours. If they are showing aggressive or destructive behaviours, avoid discussing these during the meltdown, as this may escalate the situation. Verbal language becomes more difficult to process during a meltdown, and can therefore be anxiety inducing or threatening to the individual as they are unable to understand or reply to what is being said. Discussions about their behaviour can occur once the individual is fully calm, after the event.

An Autistic Shutdown is when an individual suppressed their natural reactions within environments, or have been triggered by a situation and have yet to mentally deal with it. They will partially or completely withdraw from their surroundings, either physically or mentally. This may involve being unable to communicate, and/or the inability to move from the situation. Shutdowns are often more discreet than meltdowns, and can therefore go unnoticed. However, both meltdowns and shutdowns are an individual's response to being in crisis, and are both distressing for the individual. Those experiencing shutdown require time to withdraw and recover, and discussions regarding their behaviour should not occur during a shutdown.

### Contributing factors to a meltdown or shutdown:

- Masking traits
- Sudden or large amounts of change
- Cognitive overload
- Emotional distress
- Intense stress
- Change in routine
- Sensory overload

### Signs of a meltdown or shutdown:

- Bolting or running
- Lashing out
- Crying or shouting
- Loss of spoken communication
- Throwing items
- Losing control
- Self-Injury
- Freezing or shutting down



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### Meltdown Tools and Tricks

- Don't get angry
- Reduce sensory input
- Identify triggers and early warning signs
- Make a meltdown plan
- Allow space to express emotions
- Reduce demands
- Have an exit strategy
- Hold compassion

### Tantrum vs Meltdown

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The child is looking at you for a reaction.</li> <li>The child is considering their own safety.</li> <li>The child is making an effort to communicate their needs.</li> <li>The child is in control of their behaviour.</li> <li>The child is able to calm down after the situation is resolved.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The child is NOT looking at you for a reaction.</li> <li>The child is NOT considering their own safety.</li> <li>The child is NOT making an effort to communicate their needs.</li> <li>The child is NOT in control of their behaviour.</li> <li>The child is UNable to calm down after the situation is resolved.</li> </ul> |
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## I Want You To Know About... **Autistic Shutdown**

Autistic shutdown is like an internalized meltdown. While the person is experiencing a lot of emotions, they can't express them outwardly.

It may look like this:

zoning out



exhaustion / falling asleep



hiding / defensive position



How can allistic (non-autistic) folks help?

Safety first! Help them to a quiet space w/ minimal stimuli.



Be sensory sensible! Have a kit tailored to their needs.



Eliminate all expectations / demands. They are currently overloaded.



Reduce interaction, giving them space + time.



**REMEMBER:**

- Autistic shut-down is NOT
- stubbornness
  - laziness
  - disrespect
- Autistic shut-down IS
- involuntary
  - painful
  - exhausting

Please, be patient & compassionate ❤️

info by Kate, Girls Autistic Journey

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